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## Bahrain

### Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards

### Country Report

2006

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**Report Highlights:**

This is an update of Fairs Report BA5001. Sections updated: Appendices and sections 1-Para 8,9. The GCC countries are currently discussing the unification of import regulations to conform to the standards of the Codex Alimentarius.

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## Executive Summary

Section(s) Updated: Sections 1 - Para 9-11, Appendices revised. Last Updated: July 11, 2006

DISCLAIMER: the Agricultural Trade Office of the USDA/Foreign Agricultural Service in Dubai, UAE has prepared this report for U.S. exporters of domestic food and agricultural products. While every possible care has been taken in the preparation of this report, the information provided might be dated, as some import requirements are subject to frequent change. It is highly recommended that U.S. exporters ensure that all necessary customs clearance requirements have been verified with local authorities through your foreign importer before the sale conditions are finalized. FINAL IMPORT APPROVAL OF ANY PRODUCT IS ALWAYS SUBJECT TO THE RULES AND REGULATIONS AS INTERPRETED BY THE COUNTRY OF IMPORT AT THE TIME OF PRODUCT ENTRY.

### 1. Food Laws (updated)

Bahrain is a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which also includes Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. GCC member states are working jointly to harmonize food import standards, including label and shelf life regulations.

In 1993, the GCC made a significant step towards regulatory harmonization with adoption of Gulf Standard 150/1993, Part I, which harmonized shelf life durations for a number of food products marketed within the six member confederation.

In April 1995, Bahrain became the first GCC member to announce exceptions to GS-150. Ministerial Order No. 8/1995, effective as of November 1, 1995, lengthened the shelf life duration for a variety of food products. Bahraini officials believed that these changes would enhance trade in foods while continue to protect fully the integrity and safety of Bahrain's food supply.

In February 2004 the Ministry of Commerce issued Ministerial Decree No. 3 that authorized Bahrain's adoption of the Codex General Standard for the Labeling of Prepackaged Foods (Codex Stan 1-1985, Rev.1-1991) as the National Standard. Import policies are viewed as liberal, with no quotas or major non-tariff barriers to speak of.

The GCC countries are currently discussing the unification of import regulations to conform to the standards of the Codex Alimentarius

In general, Bahraini officials are willing to work with companies to ensure that food and agricultural products are not unduly delayed thru the import inspection process. Typically Bahrain will announce a new import regulation well in advance (often up to six months or more) of date of enforcement.

In addition, Bahrain will pre-approve food labels prior to import. Pre-import approval is strongly encouraged since it can significantly speed import clearance, particularly for new-to-market products and brands.

In January 1995 Bahrain joined the WTO. Bahrain officials remain keen to abide by WTO regulations governing food trade, specifically the SPS and TBT agreements. The Public Health Directorate (PHD), Ministry of Health (MOH), in conjunction with the Directorate of Standards and Metrology, Ministry of Commerce (MOC) are responsible for formulating food regulations. The Directorate of Agencies and Industrial Property, MOC, is responsible for formulating and enforcing trademark and agency laws. The Directorate of Customs & Ports,

Ministry of Finance and National Economy (MOFNE), is responsible for enforcing local agency laws.

The Public Health Directorate, Food & Water Control Section (FWC), MOH, is responsible for enforcing food safety regulations. For example, the FWC is responsible for inspecting all imported fresh and processed food products, verifying compliance with label regulations and, if deemed necessary, drawing samples and laboratory testing the products.

Bahrain applies 100 percent inspection on new-to-market products, high risk products and products that failed a previous inspection. All other products are subject to a random sampling review that does include a laboratory analysis periodically.

The Food Safety Committee (FSC), an interagency committee composed of representatives from MOH, the Directorate of Standards and Metrology, MOC, and the Directorate of Agriculture, Ministry of Municipal Affairs & Agriculture (MMAA), decides all food safety and control issues, including the imposition of a ban.

Consignments with minor labeling infractions may be granted a one-time waiver, if petitioned, provided the products are found to be safe for human consumption. Small consignments of 20 or less cartons, as well as ethnic food products, may be exempt from Arabic label requirements, provided prior authorization is obtained from the PHD/MOH.

The Directorate of Agriculture, MMAA, inspects live animals and plants, feedstuffs and horticultural products at port of entry.

The U.S. supplier is strongly encouraged to work closely with his local importer to obtain pre-import approval on labels, particularly for new-to-market products, and to ensure that the product meets all other requirements prior to import.

## **2. Labeling Requirements (updated)**

In February 2004 the Ministry of Commerce issued Ministerial Decree No. 3 that authorized Bahrain's adoption of the Codex General Standard for the Labeling of Prepackaged Foods (Codex Stan 1-1985, Rev.1-1991) as the National Standard. This decree supplanted Gulf Standard 9/1995 that previously governed food label requirements for products marketed in Bahrain.

Under the Codex standard, the food label must include on the original label or primary packaging the following information:

1. Product and brand name,
2. Ingredients and additives, in descending order of proportion,
3. Net content in metric units (volume in case of liquids),
4. Manufacturer's name and address,
5. Country of Origin,
6. Lot identification,
7. Expiry date (best or sell by dates are also acceptable),
8. Instructions for use (if any),
9. Special storage, transportation and handling instructions, if any

(Note: There are no local nutritional labeling requirements. The U.S. nutritional panel is acceptable.)

Original labels should be printed in Arabic, but exceptions do exist. For example, bilingual labels are permitted, provided one of the languages is Arabic (e.g. Arabic/English). In addition, Arabic language stickers are permitted in lieu of Arabic or bilingual labels, provided the sticker:

- Is extremely difficult to remove,
- Includes all label information,
- Does not cover the original label, and
- Does not contradict information on the original label.

In fact, local officials consider such stickers to be labels.

Sell by date must be engraved, embossed, printed or stamped directly onto the original label or primary packaging at the time of production, using indelible ink. U.S. bar coding is not accepted in lieu of expiry date. The expiry date must be printed in the following order, depending on the shelf life of the product:

- Day/month/year for products with a shelf life of less than 3 months;
- Month/year for products with a shelf life longer than 3 months.

Dates written in digit form are preferred. However, dates written using words such as "September 24, 2005" also are acceptable.

Ministry of Health officials report that Bahrain is committed to honor its WTO obligation to implement internationally recognized standards. Thus MOH will apply the Codex Alimentarius standards in case of any conflict with existing regulations.

Ministerial Order No. 2/1989 governs the importation of specialty food products, such as certain diet and health foods and foods for diabetics and infants. Under this order, all specialty foods must be pre-registered with the Directorate of Pharmacies and Drug Control, MOH, prior to import.

Specialty food labels must contain detailed information regarding ingredients (e.g., vitamins, supplements, minerals, etc.), nutritive value per 100 grams and instructions for use and proper storage. The U.S. nutritional panel is acceptable. There are no RDA label requirements.

Products shipped in bulk or institutional-sized containers are subject to all labeling requirements. As noted earlier, small shipments and ethnic foods may be exempt from Arabic language label requirements. Fresh produce cartons are exempted from Arabic language label requirements.

### **3. Food Additives (updated)**

Bahrain's Minister of Commerce & Industry issued Decree No. 22, dated June 21, 2005, that approved Codex Standards CXS 192:1995 for "General Standard on food additives and class names and the International Numbering System for food additives and CXS 107:1998 for "General Standard for Labeling of Food Additives when sold as such" as national standards. The common name and index number of all food color additives contained in a product must be noted on the product label. European "E" numbers are accepted.

### **4. Pesticide and other Contaminates**

Bahrain's Minister of Commerce & Industry issued Decree No. 22, dated June 21, 2005, that approved Codex Standards CXS 193:1995 for "General Standard for Contaminants and

Toxins in Food” and CXS 229:1993 for “Analysis of Pesticide Residues and Recommended Methods” as national standards.

## 5. Other Regulations and Requirements

All meat and poultry products must be accompanied by an Islamic (Halal) slaughter certificate issued by an approved Islamic center in the country of origin.

All imported eggs must be individually stamped with the supplier name or country of origin.

Unofficially poultry products are granted a 20 percent tolerance for salmonella bacteria. Inspection officials routinely test for salmonella and will reject a shipment if salmonella is detected in more than 20 percent of samples taken.

No special packaging or container size requirements exist for food products.

Bahrain Standard 988/1998, which is identical to GS 988/1998, defines the permitted level of radioactivity in foodstuff. Irradiated food products are permitted but the label must include the international irradiated foods logo. A certificate of irradiation type and level is required for these foods.

Bahrain has no regulation governing the control of foods containing a genetically modified component.

Food products imported from European countries, particularly Eastern Europe, require a radiation-free certificate. This requirement was imposed as a result of the Chernobyl accident. U.S. origin food products are exempt from this requirement.

Bahrain health authorities randomly inspect food products on the market already. In addition to visually inspecting labels, samples are taken and analyzed to ensure that product ingredients match those listed on the label. This procedure is conducted without the knowledge of the importer. If a discrepancy is found, the importer is informed and the product removed from the market and destroyed at the importer's expense.

## 6. Other Standards

“Sample” consignments face no special requirements. Samples destined for food shows or other types of promotional events are exempt from local label requirements. However, health certificates and invoices noting that the products are not for sale and are of no commercial value must accompany them.

As noted in Section 2, Ministerial Order No. 2/1989 governs specialty food products. All specialty foods must be pre-registered with the Directorate of Pharmacies and Drug Control, MOH.

Alcoholic beverages and pork, as well as food products containing alcohol or pork, are strictly regulated. For example, retail outlets can only sell pork products from special counters that are clearly marked.

Only four companies are licensed to import alcoholic beverages. These companies may retail the product directly thru their own establishment or market it to institutional end users, such as hotels and licensed restaurants. Supermarkets are prohibited from selling alcoholic beverages. Media is prohibited from advertising alcoholic products, although in-house promotion in the liquor store or licensed restaurant is permitted.

## 7. Copyright/Trademark Laws

Legislative Decree No. 10/1992, amended by Legislative Decree No. 8 of 1998, governs commercial agencies. Importation of a brand officially registered to a local agent is less strictly regulated than before. At present any trader may import a product that is registered in another firm's name, provided the registered agent is paid a commission, the maximum of which is 5 percent. The Ministry of Commerce (MOC) may reduce or even exempt the payment of any commission. The principal may terminate an existing agency agreement. The agent is responsible for proving to a grievance committee that his activities resulted in an apparent success in promoting the product. The Directorate of Customs and Ports will release a consignment only if imported by the registered agent or if the importer obtains written permission from the registered agent, after paying the commission. MOC may waive this commission for certain products, if deemed in the public's interest.

The Agencies and Industrial Property Directorate of the Ministry of Commerce handles trademark registration, which usually can be completed within a short time. Although a foreign company can register its trademark directly with the directorate, usually a local, specialized accounting firm would be retained to conduct such work.

## 8. Import Procedures

Nearly all of Bahrain's food imports enter the country via the main port of Mina Salman, located in the capital, Manama. The port boasts state-of-the-art facilities and equipment.

Imports from Saudi Arabia, a major supplier of food products to Bahrain, usually arrive via the 25-mile long King Fahed causeway, which links Bahrain to its neighbor.

Bahrain International Airport also receives a considerable amount of food products, particularly fresh fruits and fresh vegetables, chilled meats and deli products.

Fresh products are usually cleared within 24 hours of arrival and all other food products within as little as two days to a week, depending on the type of laboratory analysis required.

The following documents are required for food imports:

- Commercial invoice,
- Packing list,
- Bill of Lading,
- Health certificate from the country of origin,
- Halal slaughter certificate (for meat and meat products),
- Certified certificate of origin (see below).

A U.S./Arab chamber of commerce and the Bahrain Embassy, or one of its consulates, in the United States, must notarize the certificate of origin. Another Arab embassy or consulate may be used, if a Bahraini government mission is not located near the exporter.

If no other Arab government mission is located near the exporter, a statement from the local American chamber of commerce verifying this situation will suffice. A U.S./Arab chamber of commerce, however, must still notarize the certificate of origin.

A consignment rejected for being unfit for human consumption must be re-exported (but not to another GCC country) or destroyed, normally within two to three months of arrival.

Products denied entry due to labeling infractions may later be cleared upon appeal, provided the infraction was minor. New-to-market and ethnic food products with minor labeling infractions have been cleared for import on a one-time basis.

Serious labeling infractions will result in rejection of a shipment with no real chance of successful appeal. Major labeling infractions include: label tampering, missing or incorrectly printed expiry date or date printed on the sticker rather than original label/packaging.

In January 2003, Bahrain implemented the "GCC Unified Customs Law and Single Customs Tariff" (UCL). The UCL established a unified customs tariff of five percent on practically all processed food products. Under the UCL, live animals, fresh fruits and vegetables, seafood, grains, flours, tea, sugar, spices and seeds for planting are exempt from any import duty.

The UCL established a single entry point policy. In other words, a product entering any GCC member market would pay the appropriate duty at point of entry into the GCC, then be permitted duty free transit among GCC member countries. To date, however, not every GCC country has implemented the single entry point policy for a variety of reasons, including disparity of food control procedures, quality of health laboratories and procedures for dividing tariff proceeds among member countries.

On May 27, 2004 the United States and Bahrain completed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) designed to remove barriers and facilitate trade between both countries. Under this agreement Bahrain will substantially open its services market, streamline digital trade, protect intellectual property, facilitate government procurement and provide for effective enforcement of labor and environmental laws. Bahrain is the fourth Middle East country that has negotiated an FTA with the U.S. As of this writing, the FTA remains waiting for approval by the U.S. Congress.

**APPENDIX: Regulatory Agencies/Useful Contacts****I. Ministry Of Health****Dr. Abdulla Ahmad Abdulla Ali**

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